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ABSTRACT

Since speech communication is experiencing numerous changes, it is useful to examine some of the causes of inadequate teaching in the field and various ways to solve the problems. Some causes of poor teaching are (1) the small value placed on university teaching compared to other criteria for tenure and promotion; (2) the classification or divisions existing in tenure and promotion standards (such as teaching, research or creative work, and service); (3) boredom from teaching the same material repeatedly; and (4) pressures to remain in an unchanging program. Solutions to the problems involve determining the nature and extent of the difficulty, specifically whether content expertise or delivery skills are involved. Delivery skills can be judged by student evaluations, which are most effective if not too severe. Established centers for developing teacher competence emphasize the effort to recognize and reward effective teaching as much as research is rewarded. Finally, teaching competence can be increased through workshops, instructional development programs, or from sharing suggestions with supportive, nonevaluative colleagues. (The endnotes contain 15 suggestions for establishing an effective, nonthreatening evaluation program.) (EL)

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Helping Teachers Become Better Teachers

by

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At the beginning of this project I was somewhat skeptical of the terminology in saying "helping teachers to teach," because at the higher educational level, we invariably call faculty members professors rather than teachers. A teacher is one who transfers information, whereas a professor, based on the Latin concept, is one who professes an intellectual discipline. Yet, maybe that is part of the difficulty -- teaching is often deemphasized. Our faculty evaluations often give lip service to teaching, but they tend to urge the research and publication by an appointee. A recent publication entitled, Improving Undergraduate Education Through Faculty Development, noted this:

> Academics tend to be professionals in their discipline but... secondary attention is given to teaching itself....
> If there is so little recognition of the "teaching" competencies of professionals entering the field, there is likely to be little recognition of the need to develop established faculty as teachers.[1]

Yet, our panel topic focuses on "established" faculty, as we are to "encourage professional growth and development of tenured faculty." Even if the entering faculty are effective teachers, some phases in their tenured careers might require further instructional development, e.g., they may lose touch with newer developments in their disciplines or assume roles requiring competence in areas that they have not previously taught. Changing conditions within the institution, discipline, or profession also have impact.[2]

Such changes are emerging at my urban institution where there are fewer "traditional students," more adult learners, and increased minority and female enrollments. Further, students are greatly influenced by shifts in the kinds of jobs available after graduation, and by the impact of technology on their lives and employment.

The need for adapting to these new demands in teaching content or styles is likely to worsen as time goes by. Technology advances as the number of

older faculty members increases. "The modal age of tenured faculty by the year 2,000 is estimated to be between fifty-six and sixty-five. In 1981, that modal age range was thirty-six to forty-five (Chait and Ford, 1982)."[3]

Speech Communication is experiencing numerous changes. Not long ago, the major thrust was rhetoric and public address, with teaching concentration on the classical approach to stand up-knock-'em-down-public speaking.

At the SCA Convention here in Denver in August, 1963, I remember a noted person in our field referring to the research mode among many as being one of "pick-a-dead-man-and-do-him." Rhetoric and public address is still an important area of our discipline, but the demand for the number of specialists in that area has shifted. Yet, many public address teaching specialists are tenured, still around, and will be for some time to come. In some places, the numbers of such courses has declined. Now, greater demand is for courses in interpersonal, nonverbal, and various aspects of organizational communication, health communication, and the list goes on.

In the midst of all this are problems of burn-out and general alienation for some members of our faculties. Some who were good teachers are becoming less so. Some of those are aware of the problem but don't admit it; others rationalize it away or do not even recognize any trouble.

Today, I want to (1) explore some of the major causes of inadequate teaching, and (2) present some approaches to solving the problem, i.e. ways of "helping teachers become better teachers."

One cause of poorer teaching is the small value placed on university teaching compared to other criteria for tenure and promotion. In his article on "Faculty Motivation," Richard Mowday summarized research studies by saying:

> There is little doubt that effectiveness in teaching is held in lower regard by many faculty than is research productivity, despite evidence which suggests that only a few faculty ever make a meaningful research contribution (Centra, 1979). Morrow (1974) may be correct when he suggests that the prestige of a faculty member on campus depends less upon what he or she is paid than on how little the individual teaches.[4]

Universities perpetuate this problem by only minimally rewarding good teaching. Rewards are often of a token nature; usually in the Spring, one or two faculty members will be presented "outstanding teacher awards." At this rate, an extremely small percentage of good teachers are ever recognized, and usually this carries fleeting prestige with sometimes a remarkably small stipend. In contrast, if a faculty member wants a salary increment or financial support for travel, the prospects are better with a publication or a convention paper, the latter not necessarily being "scholarly." Eble and McKeachie tell us:

> The standard way of getting travel money is to read a paper at a professional meeting; most often the paper is not well-suited -- in subject, language, style, and manner of presentation -- to the students the professor is actually teaching. The presupposition in most of these practices is that development of greater command over a subject matter will contribute to the faculty member's general competence, of which teaching is one aspect. Even if we grant that somewhat shaky assumption, the nature of institutional support tends to slight teaching, to divert the faculty member's already fragmented attention away from the classroom, students, and learning. Few schools pay conscious attention to the ways in which faculty members develop as teachers, sustain their efforts, or decline.[5]

Incidentally, this misplaced emphasis away from effective teaching is not strictly from administrative misguidance. Faculty members and faculty governing bodies have bought into this themselves. They advance themselves by focussing on "research projects," thus perpetuating this non-teaching syndrome.

A closely related cause results from the classifications or divisions in our tenure and promotion standards. Maybe this system is suffering from a hardening of the categories. Like most other institutions, Indiana University

requires faculty members to produce in (1) teaching, (2) research or creative work and (3) service. A candidate must excel in one of those areas and be at least satisfactory in each of the other two. It has been difficult to quantify or establish satisfactoriness in teaching, let alone excellence. Likewise, it has been more difficult for administrators to establish unsatisfactoriness in teaching than in the other areas. Therefore, in the quest for tenure or promotion, a faculty member probably more safely has been able to deemphasize teaching and compile research and service records. Eble and McKeachie tell us that "when faculty members are given a choice about what might best further their own professional development, they gravitate toward conventional support -- time off and travel funds -- of their own research."[6]

Another cause for poor teaching, or teaching effort, can be that a faculty member gets tired of teaching the same material. Yet, he is stuck with it for various reasons. Maybe he/she was hired to teach a specialized subject and the person does not have time and/or ideas for a fresher approach.

In some communication departments, there are numerous skills courses to be taught. The instructors could get in a rut by teaching skills courses while conducting research that can enhance their professional standing even though it is only peripheral at best to what they are teaching. Maybe this is why many of us know people who think they have taught for twenty years when really they have taught only one year twenty times.

Speech communication is related to, draws upon, and can contribute to many other fields. It is possible that instructors teach some courses in which they are not interested -- indeed, maybe many courses. We might have among us some frustrated historians, lawyers, psychologists, social-psychologists, political scientists, etc., etc., ad nauseam. And our discipline is not the only one

with such frustrations. After viewing this problem in higher education overall, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, in his chapter in Motivating Professors to Teach Effectively, found these general effects: "The teacher who does not find his or her subject matter worthwhile in and of itself, but teaches it only for extrinsic reasons -- pay or prestige -- wastes his own time and conveys the message to students that learning is only a means to other ends and lacks intrinsic value."[7]

There are yet other causes. In our discipline, a professor who primarily teaches non-majors might not have many students for more than one or two classes. Under such circumstances the professor cannot witness or become concerned with the intellectual growth and development of students, a key dimension in teaching. In an essay on "The Rewards of Teaching," Wilbert McKeachie tells us: "If one is to observe growth in students and have the satisfaction of attributing some of that growth to one's own teaching, opportunities for working with students over long periods of time -- longer than a typical one-term course -- are likely to be important."[8]

Poor teaching also can be caused by pressures on professors to remain in programs that are different from them, either because they have changed and the programs have not or the programs have changed and they have not. The job market could force continuation of this incompatible situation. In his Editor's Notes for Motivating Professors to Teach Effectively, James Bess wrote:

> There is an increasing proportion of faculty who are constrained to remain at their institutions instead of, as in former times, seeking what seem to be greener pastures....We may expect to see increasing numbers of faculty shifting from positive...involvement to alienative involvement....
>
> ...Instead of recognizing the changes within themselves, they tend to shift the locus of causality to their environments.[9]

There are other causes for poor teaching, but these have been some of the main ones. What can be done about the problem? First, the nature and extent of difficulties must be ascertained. In other words, careful teaching evaluations must be made. This involves numerous sources of information. For instance, teaching involves dimensions of (1) content expertise, which comprises a body of skills, competencies, and knowledge, and (2) delivery skills, which comprise human interaction skills and characteristics that promote or facilitate learning, creating an appropriate learning environment. The content portion can be evaluated by studying such materials as course syllabi and examinations; this can be done by chairpersons and faculty colleagues. The delivery skills dimension can be judged some by colleague observation, but most validly by student evaluations. In 1983, Peter Seldin polled 616 public and private liberal arts colleges. This was an 80% response to the 770 questionnaires distributed. Results showed that chair evaluation was always used in nearly 80% of the institutions and Faculty Committees were always used in nearly 48%. These faculty committees made increasing use of studying syllabi, examinations, and other course materials in assessing content expertise. 71.9% of all institutions always used "systematic student ratings;" this was a dramatic increase over the 64.1% in 1978.[10] Such combined methods, when used with specific precautions and objectivity can serve well to focus on which teachers need help and where they need it. There is a more overriding issue of whether or not evaluations, especially student ratings, are valid and reliable. Virtually hundreds of researchers have probed these questions in the past decade. Probably the most recent and comprehensive review was made by L.A. Braskamp and others for the Measurement and Research Division of the University of Illinois in 1983. They concluded that student ratings "have sufficient

validity to warrant their use for both personnel decisions and improvement purposes."[11] While it might seem paradoxical that communicators should be concerned with pedagogical delivery skills, there are some serious problems even with the interpersonal skills of some of us who attempt to teach interpersonal skills. And this is emphasized by student ratings.

The value of student ratings in motivating a teacher to do a better job will depend on their severity of criticism. This is not unlike some persuasion studies on the comparative impact of strong and mild fear appeals. That is, the fear element can be so strong that the persuadee will dissociate from it, whereas a milder one will achieve an appropriate response. John Centra remarked that:

> Research evidence indicates that when one encounters a discrepancy between one's self-theory and other evidence, there is motivation to do something. When one receives poor student ratings, the threat to self may be so great that one tries to avoid teaching or defend against the threat by denying the validity of the student judgments, or by retreating to the most conventional and minimally involving kinds of teaching. However, when moderate discrepancies exist and one's sense of self-competence includes the hope of improvement, motivation to change may result in greater effectiveness. (For evidence, see Centra, 1973).[12]

In light of this, we can see why there are some who shy away from and deny evaluation results, be they from colleagues or students. John M. Bevan in Practices That Improve Teaching Evaluation, told us:

> Unfortunately, in the minds of many college professors evaluation is perceived as punitive and is regarded as an infringement on privacy, yet this attitude is strongly unbecoming in persons who daily devote themselves to developing critical skills and judgment in others, who regularly gauge the progress of their charges by the refinement of those critical abilities.[13]

Of course, evaluation and critical analysis are especially essential to speech communication. An effective, non-threatening evaluation system can be achievable. Among the numerous guidelines for establishing such a program are

the fifteen suggestions by Peter Seldin. Itemized completely in the footnotes of this study, they range from "obtaining active support and involvement of top-level administrators, through obtaining widespread faculty involvement in every step of the program's development, to tying faculty evaluation efforts to overall recognition, reward, and improvement of faculty performance.[14] After evaluation has been made, an instructional development program can be implemented.

Related to developing teaching competence are various centers established at public and private universities such as Colorado State, Illinois, Memphis State, Syracuse, University of Tennessee, and the University of Texas.

The Kellogg Foundation established a center at Northwestern and the Danforth Foundation has centers at Stanford and Harvard. The Office of Education has a Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, which subsidizes instructional development. And, now, there is even a "Professional and Organizational Network in Higher Education which coordinates developmental efforts.

While time does not permit detailed explanation of the various instructional development activities, we can note some of their emphases. Possibly foremost among these is an effort to recognize and reward effective teaching alongside research, instead of as a step-child to it. After surveying developmental programs nationwide, Eble and McKeachie observed that there was not a sharp line in them between scholarly development and teaching competence. The programs tried to increase the professors' interest in and commitment to teaching, reinforce and reward excellent teaching, and provide opportunities to bring about this kind of growth.[15] Grants, fellowships, or leaves -- including sabbaticals -- emphasized not only research projects but ones to enhance delivery skills in teaching. These can include planning and organizing

courses, skills in using various teaching methods, skills in evaluation, modeling, stimulation, problem-solving and the like.

In our discipline, we say there are some developments that make us different from some areas with traditional research emphases, i.e. we can focus on creative work. Likewise, in establishing our tenure and promotion cases, we should recognize the developments in speech communication that call for adaptation and changes in teaching -- in terms of both form (especially in skills courses) and in substance. We can emphasize teaching as an area in which excellence can be established and proved to committees. An effective evaluation system really can be tied to long-range faculty recognition. Developing and improving instructional performance will count.

Faculty development for effective teaching can take many forms. People can increase their sense of competence through workshops or from sharing with supportive and nonevaluative colleagues who might give or "share" suggestions about effective teaching methods. As much as possible, faculty members need to participate in choosing the courses they might teach, so they can get variety, and have a chance to work with some of the same students over longer periods -- to watch them grow.

Annually, Indiana University's Learning Resources Committee has a symposium on some phase of teaching. A prestigious guest gives a keynote address and the remainder of the symposium is divided into various mini-workshops. Those administrators and faculty who need most to attend sometimes do not, but the opportunity is there.

Communication administrators should encourage faculty participation and involvement in such activities, in non-threatening evaluation programs and in instructional development programs. Perhaps most important, they should pave

the way for assuring faculty members, through word and deed, that a good promotion or increment case can be made on the basis of teaching.

ENDNOTES

1. Kenneth E. Eble and Wilbert J. McKeachie, Improving Undergraduate Education Through Faculty Development (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1985), p.5.
2. Ibid., p. 19.
3. Ibid., p. 3.
4. Robert T. Mowday, "Expectancy Theory Approaches to Faculty Motivation," in James L. Bess (ed), Motivating Professors to Teach Effectively (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1982), p. 60.
5. Eble and McKeachie, Ibid., p. 7.
6. Ibid., p. 9.
7. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Intrinsic Motivation and Effective Teaching: a Flow Analysis," in Bess, Ibid., p. 21.
8. Wilbert J. McKeachie, "The Rewards of Teaching," in Bess, Ibid., p. 12.
9. James L. Bess (ed), "Editor's Notes," Ibid., pp. 2-3.
10. Peter Seldin, Changing Practices in Faculty Evaluation (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1984), p. 52.
11. Cited in Ibid., p. 135.
12. Ibid., p. 11.
13. John M. Bevan, "The Chairman: Product of Socialization or Training?" in Grace French-Lazovik (ed), Practices That Improve Teaching Evaluation (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1982), p. 22.
14. Seldin, Ibid., pp. 156-7. The Guidelines include:
    (1) Obtain the active support and involvement of top-level administrators
    (2) Obtain widespread faculty involvement in every step of the program's development.

(3) Decide on the specific roles played by administrators, faculty members, the faculty senate, students, and, if applicable, representatives of the faculty union and the board of trustees. (Usually, representatives of each segment of the academic community are appointed to a central coordinating committee.)

(4) Pay scrupulous attention to campus protocol. Knowing how to thread its way through the administrative/faculty governance maze is especially important for the faculty evaluation committee.

(5) Hold open forum during the developmental stage of the rating instruments, methods, and procedures. Encourage the student newspaper to report on the meeting.

(6) Determine objectives and uses of the evaluation data.

(7) Determine the who, what, where, and when in the implementation of the evaluation system as well as the specific roles of administrators, faculty members, and students.

(8) Keep all segments of the campus community informed on a continuing basis. Two-way communication is vital to the coordinating committee. For example, many committees report periodically on their activities and progress at general faculty meetings and in newsletters.

(9) Anticipate resistance and deal with it sympathetically by demonstrating understanding. Use a trade-off approach to emphasize the benefits to faculty in improved performance.

(10) Determine the financing of the faculty evaluation system.

(11) Establish an office to administer the faculty evaluation program. If the assessment data are to be used for personnel decisions, the faculty development office should not serve as the administrative body.

(12) Allow sufficient time to implement the system, and work diligently to develop a solid research base and to demonstrate genuine enthusiasm for the program.

(13) Conduct dry runs to improve the rating instruments and administrative procedures.

(14) Carry out follow-up studies to assess the effectiveness of the program and to improve it.

(15) Tie faculty evaluation to overall efforts for the recognition, reward, and improvement of faculty performance.

15. Eble and McKeachie, Ibid., p. 14.